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SUBJECT: CROATIA WELCOMES MONTENEGRIN REFERENDUM RESULT

¶1. (U) The initial reaction of GOC officials toward the Montenegrin independence referendum, as reported by the press, has been generally positive. In a May 25 Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader issued a statement in support of the outcome of Montenegro's Referendum on Independence. The statement assessed that the voting process was free and fair, and that the outcome was an honest reflection of the majority of Montenegrin citizens. The Croatian Prime Minister also added, "We will be among the first to recognize Montenegro, together with the European Union." Sanader added that he supports regional integration and stability, and integration of the region into the whole of Europe.

¶2. (U) The GOC statement also welcomed Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic's previously-offered apology for war-time attacks on Dubrovnik as a step towards overcoming lingering negative feelings about Montenegro's role in some of the more notorious events of the recent past. However, the statement noted recognition of an independent Montenegro can only be given provided it fully renounces its role in Serbia's aggression towards Croatia in the 1990s. Some media commentary notes expresses concern that Serbia will inherit all responsibility for war crimes committed until Montenegro's 1999 pronounced neutrality and separation from Milosevic.

¶3. (U) Sanader's statement also notes that:
-- the GOC intends to develop good neighborly relations with Montenegro, calling for cooperation based on "mutual respect and joint efforts in promoting peace in this region" as a premise for regional integration;
-- further cooperation between Serbia and Montenegro in this ongoing process is considered elemental in its success, and should be done in accordance with all democratic standards;
-- the GOC is optimistic that as a result of the referendum, Serbia will improve its own social and economic situation, as well as experience better integration in the regional and international community; and
-- the GOC welcomed the role of the European Union in implementing the referendum, as affirming its role in the stabilization of the region and the maintenance of good relations between the states of former Yugoslavia.

¶4. (U) According to press reports, Croatian President Stjepan Mesic also sent a personal message to Serbian President Boris Tadic following the referendum, noting developments in southeast Europe and Croatia-Serbia relations in particular.

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